Shaping Tomorrow’s Sustainability: Unraveling Gen Z’s Decision-Making Journey for Sustainable Consumption

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Abstract

The largest generation on earth, Generation Z, holds substantial market power. They were born onto a planet that is overheating, in a society characterized by high growth and technological advancements at an accelerated speed, and are inheriting substantial sustainability, socio-economic, and climate change challenges. Given this, they are aware of the importance of incorporating sustainability into their purchasing decisions. Since the contemporary topic of sustainable decision-making of Gen Z is still in its nascent stage, this research further investigates the process an individual goes through when deciding what aspects guide them in decisions as well as what could possibly hinder Gen Z to turn sustainable purchasing intentions into behavior. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals of Europe’s Gen Z cohort and subsequently processed using thematic analysis. Based on the EBM customer decision model, the information integration theory, and the green intention-behavior gap model, three categories focusing on rational, value-based, and intentional themes were derived. Results show that Gen Z goes through a complex decision process which is based on their strongly held values. Their intention to act sustainably is prevalent throughout the process, where they often combat internalized consumerism, search for authentic and honest information, rely on family, friends, their sustainability education and knowledge, their favorite brands, and are skeptical about claims made by companies. Even if individuals desire to purchase sustainably all the time, price, availability and accessibility, missing aesthetics as well as skepticism and the lack of transparency and regulations in terms of sustainability terminology hinders them to turn intentions into actions.

Keywords: Generation Z, sustainable decision-making, sustainable consumption, sustainable marketing, green intention-behavior gap
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1. Introduction

Sustainability according to the United Nations 1987 Brundtland Report is meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p.15). Sustainability has been part of the public consciousness since the release of the Brundtland Report and has entered the lexicon of the business world as customers increasingly demand sustainable products in order to align their concern about the environmental and social landscape with their consumption patterns. In fact, the academic literature has confirmed that there is a positive relationship between a businesses’ sustainable initiatives, corporate social responsibility, and brand image and sustainable consumer behavior (Jia, Iqbal, Ayub, Fatima, & Rasool, 2023). The business sector understands that in order to be competitive in the market, it is imperative that efforts are made toward making both operations and products more sustainable and communicating those changes to consumers.

Sustainability marketing has become an important subfield of marketing and has been of particular focus over the past 20 years (Bhattacharyya, 2022). Marketing professionals often segment their audiences by generational cohorts and that remains true for sustainability marketing. Generation Z, including individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), is the largest living generation on earth, accounting for about 32 percent of the population (Miller & Lu, 2018). Thus, Gen Z has enormous purchasing power (Verma, Tripathi, & Singh, 2021), which in combination with this cohort’s general concern with the concept of “truth” (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), suggests that businesses should consider transparency in their operations since this cohort could exert significant influence on the market.

Gen Z is also the first generation to grow up with access to the internet and social media from birth, making them true digital natives. Throughout their lives, they have been exposed to social networks, mobile systems, and the internet, which has created a generation that is more interconnected than generations before (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Gen Z consumes more responsibly, shows more sustainable consciousness (Djafarova & Foots, 2022), and views consumption as a way to express individual identity and expect brands and companies to take a stand on values related to the products they sell (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).
Today’s consumers engage in extensive information research before they decide on what option to buy. The diversity and richness of information available to consumers poses clear challenges for consumers and marketers in terms of preventing distraction and fragmentation of information (Sachdeva, 2020). Generation Z has sources that they trust and find credible, and they often return to these sources, which helps them to develop their opinion and point of view quickly (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). This process, in combination with the fact that this generation is aware of sustainability issues and clearly knows that their decisions might have an effect on the environment and other people, makes the sustainable decision-making process of Gen Z a highly relevant topic for research.

Studies already look at Gen Z’s sustainable consumption behavior from different perspectives, using diverse theories to explain it (Djafarova & Foots, 2022; Robichaud & Yu, 2021; Le, Nguyen, & Kieu, 2020; Le, Tran, & Hoang, 2022). For example, Djafarova and Foots (2022) explore, using the theory of planned behavior, which factors encourage Gen Z to translate purchase intention to actual purchasing behavior, highlighting that their frugality limits sustainable purchasing decisions (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). The research by Le et al. (2022) focused on the influence of environmental concern and socialization agents on sustainably minded consumer behavior of Vietnam’s Gen Z, drawing on the socialization framework, and found that peers and family have an effect on individuals to pay more for sustainable products (Le et al., 2022). These recently published articles make Gen Z’s sustainable purchasing decision-making process a relevant topic, which calls for further research.

From a theoretical perspective, there is a lack of research in this subject area simply due to its contemporary nature, as Gen Z is coming of age as part of the workforce and are just now beginning to be considered substantial consumers. Secondly, because this generation’s consumer behavior varies significantly from the behavior of Gen X and Millennials, Gen Z’s sustainable consumer behavior itself is under-researched (Le et al., 2020) and yet this generation is the driving force behind social changes towards more sustainable or responsible consumption habits (Le et al., 2022). To investigate Gen Z’s sustainable decision-making process, the study utilizes two main models and a third theory: the customer decision-making model (the EBM model), information integration theory (IIT), and “the green intention-behavior gap” model (GIBG). The EBM model
follows the assumption that consumers are rational (Tang & Zhu, 2019) and helps to understand how individuals make decisions as well as what variables influence their decisions (Card, Chen, & Cole, 2003). IIT is a cognitive theory that describes how an individual takes information from a variety of sources and integrates it into a judgment using a simple algebraic model (Anderson, 1971). Additionally, we will examine Gen Z’s decision-making process through the lens of the “green intention-behavior gap”, the inconsistency between what an individual claims about their concern for sustainability issues and what they do in terms of their sustainable consumption behaviors (ElHaffar, Durif, & Dubé, 2020). What the “green gap” suggests is that most consumers continue to make purchasing decisions based on price, quality, convenience, and brand recognition, instead of making a sustainable purchase (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Weatherell, Tregear, & Allinson, 2003). By exploring Gen Z’s connection to the green intention-behavior gap, we will see if this is a significant phenomenon within this generational cohort and if so, why it is occurring so that companies can work to narrow the gap using marketing as a tool.

In relation to practice, Gen Z is the most recent generation of consumers. Companies selling goods and services need to understand the needs of their target market, especially because they represent the largest living generation (Miller & Lu, 2018). There are two major defining features of Generation Z - one is their demand for sustainable products (Robichaud & Yu, 2021) and the other is that this cohort is the first to be termed digital nativists. So, companies’ marketing departments have two distinct challenges to gain this market segment as consumers - to sell themselves as trustworthy, sustainable, responsible companies that create socially and environmentally sound products and to market those products and services through the creation of authentic and compelling marketing campaigns that resonate with this generation. Since Gen Z is highly concerned about environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and their consumption footprint (Djafarova & Foots, 2022), it presents an increased pressure on companies to bend toward the consumer’s demand, which could lead to increased sustainability or anti-consumerism. The aim of this research is to gain insight into how Gen Z makes decisions to purchase sustainable products to fill theoretical gaps mentioned above and provide marketing professionals and companies opportunities to understand this market segment to ultimately offer Gen Z products that align more closely to their values.
As this topic applies to theory and practice, the following research questions were formulated, leading to a qualitative research method:

*Research question 1:* What aspects guide Gen Z’s decision-making process for sustainable purchases?

*Research question 2:* How does Gen Z make decisions in relation to the green intention-behavior gap?

This research is structured in seven chapters. First, a background of the study is provided, highlighting what current research says about sustainability marketing, the generational cohort Gen Z, marketing for Gen Z and what is already known about which aspects guide Gen Z’s sustainable decision-making. Afterwards, the theoretical framework is presented, giving an elaborated definition and an explanation of the main components of the models and theories. Subsequently, the conceptual model of this thesis is illustrated, which brings the models and theories mentioned together. The next chapter explains the research design and methodology, including reliability and validity as well as limitations of the study. Then, the analysis chapter includes a descriptive overview of the data and presents the findings of the study in relation to the chosen theories and models. Next are the discussion as well as the conclusion sections, where results get discussed in relation to the models and theories used as well as previous studies. Additionally, research questions are answered, and final conclusions drawn, ending with implications for practice and regulations as well as theory development and future research directions.
2. Background

The following chapter reviews existing literature on sustainable marketing research and the sample population of Gen Z, including their characteristics. Afterwards, marketing research about niche and cohort marketing is analyzed followed by defining sustainable decision-making. Subsequently, an analysis about marketing strategies to target Gen Z gets conducted, followed by a detailed summary of their sustainable decision-making and what guides them in their sustainable purchasing decisions. Specifically, this chapter is arranged into the following sections: Sustainability Marketing, Gen Z: True Digital Natives, Marketing for Gen Z, Sustainable Decision-Making, and Guiding Aspects of Gen Z’s Sustainable Decision-Making Process.

2.1. Sustainability Marketing

From a values-based perspective, marketing is focused on identifying customers’ evolving needs and providing customer satisfaction, which may or may not include profit (Jones, Clarke-Hill, Comfort, & Hillier, 2008). When a company is marketing for profit only, their goal is to urge consumers to purchase items they do not inherently need in a way that makes the item seem more desirable (Palmer, 2012). Marketing is a critical tool for companies to reach their target audiences to create a relationship with current and future customers and it is necessary for companies to continually study the evolving needs and desires of customers. In recent times, consumers have become increasingly aware of sustainability and related global issues such as climate change. This awareness has translated into demand for companies to produce more sustainable products. In fact, sustainability is so ingrained across disciplines and cultures that it has now become an imperative that businesses meet this demand and find ways to make their operations/supply chains more sustainable while producing sustainable products (Bhattacharyya, 2022). As such, sustainability marketing has become a well-developed subfield of marketing. It was originally conceived of in 1971 (Kassarjian, 1971) as “ecological marketing” and has evolved many times since then, with a major change occurring from 1985 onward with “green marketing” when research pointed to the fact that consumers would be willing to spend more on green products (Bhattacharyya, 2022). This has motivated companies to focus more seriously on creating sustainable products since it can yield higher profits.
There are a variety of definitions for sustainability marketing. According to Jung, Kim and Kim (2020), sustainability marketing is focused on creating relationships between customers, the environment, and the social environment that are sustainable in nature. It is ultimately the synergy between the environmental, social, and economical dimensions of business. It has also been defined by Kirchgeorg and Winn (2006, p.176) as “the planning, coordination, implementation, and controlling of all market transactions in such a way that a sustained satisfaction of the needs of current and potential customers toward the achievement of corporate objectives is granted, while at the same time contributing towards reducing ecological and social impacts and restoring social and ecological health.” Put simply, sustainability marketing is designed to deliver and increase customer value, social value, and ecological value (Elkinton, 1999).

However, there is an inherent paradox within the concept and practice of sustainability marketing. The concept of sustainability is equated with consuming less while the field of marketing is focused on fueling consumerism. While this tension creates a sense of cognitive dissonance, it does not mean the two concepts cannot coexist. Contemporary research suggests that a synergy exists among the two; marketing provides an opportunity for both companies and consumers to promote initiatives for sustainability (Lim, 2016). When companies focus on sustainability, this provides opportunities for positive consumer perceptions of the company and thus an increase in profits (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019).

To better understand their audience, marketing practitioners segment or find niches to effectively reach consumers. The more companies understand how consumers think, feel, and act in relation to sustainable consumption, the better they are able to provide products they demand, especially since consumers claim they are willing to spend up to 40% more on products they feel are sustainable (Nichols & Holt, 2023). By focusing on sustainable decision-making, which is consciously incorporating sustainability into one’s decision-making process, marketing professionals can gain deeper insight into how this type of consumer makes their decisions, ultimately finding better and easier ways to reach this market segment. It is important to note that sustainable consumer decision-making is focused on longer-term benefits, both socially and environmentally, which varies greatly from the traditional consumer decision-making which is focused more on immediate
benefits for oneself (White et al., 2019). A common way that marketing professionals segment their audience is through generational cohorts, since they tend to share life experiences such as historical events and social trends at the same time and similarly develop the same values and behaviors (Nichols & Holt, 2023).

2.2. Gen Z: True Digital Natives

Gen Z and Millennials are buzzwords nowadays, referring to different generations of the global population. According to Strauss and Howe (1991) a generation is defined as years of birth, which usually extend from 20 to 25 years in duration (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Based on the generational cohort theory, which was first proposed by Inglehart (1977), the population can be divided into comparable groups of people, or generations, based on their norms, values, expectations, characteristics, experiences, lifestyles, histories, and the significant events that have shaped their lives (Inglehart, 1977). Thus, each generation has their own beliefs, values, expectations, and experiences, which are ingrained and preserved by its members (Dabija & Lung, 2018).

The first generation of true digital natives, Gen Z, was born between 1995 and 2010 (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Smartphones are a necessity for them (Verma et al., 2021) as they grew up exposed to the internet (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) never knowing a world without it, being accustomed to communicating and interacting in a world with constant connection (Turner, 2015). Due to Gen Z's highly developed technological skills, they enjoy 24/7 access to information from around the world, in addition to being able to instantly communicate with friends, favorite companies, brands, celebrities, and influencers. (Dabija & Lung, 2018). Additionally, their technological affinity gives rise to Gen Z’s usage of social media. Interacting on social media platforms and applications plays a significant role in their socializing behavior, representing their urge to be informed and involved with other people (Prakash Yadav & Rai, 2017).

Furthermore, this generation is born into and grew up in an overheated era, characterized by high growth and advancements at an accelerated speed, in economy, population, digital connectivity, waste production, and energy consumption. The hypercomplex challenges they need to grasp are now leading to an extraordinary socio-political battle for intergenerational climate justice. Nowadays, Gen Z fights for climate justice through different channels like social media campaigns, the formation of international alliances,
and school strikes for climate, a movement that accelerated within two years with the help of Greta Thunberg, the internationally known Swedish youth climate justice activist. This reflects global connectivity that grows at an unprecedented pace and scale which represents a central aspect of the current overheated era. These young activists additionally call out adults, who sometimes demonstrate short-sighted hypocrisy, even when knowing that the current profit-driven lifestyle and consumption are not sustainable and are only possible because resources of future generations are being used (Biswas, 2021).

Growing up with those challenges leaves Gen Z with a great level of awareness in terms of importance of environmental responsibility (Dragolea et al., 2023), but also expresses very deep interest in social responsibility (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). In general, this generation is inheriting substantial sustainability, socio-economic and climate change challenges compared to previous cohorts (Tan, Wanganoo, & Mathur, 2023). Due to this understanding, individuals are aware of green lifestyles and know their responsibility towards the environment (Noor, Jumain, Yusof, Ahmat, & Kamaruzaman, 2017) which makes them, among all the present consumers, the most interested in the incorporation of sustainability in their lifestyles (Dabija & Bejan, 2017). Their sustainable consciousness and environmental as well as social sustainability stems from individual action which gets adopted through reduced plastic consumption, recycling, reduced fashion consumption, or veganism (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Additionally, individuals have the intention, despite their young age, to purchase products that are environmentally friendly (Noor et al., 2017). This is why their daily life consists of seeking green services and products, which promote social responsibility, implement environmental protection, and adopt specific measures in order to support local communities and protect employees (Dabija & Bejan, 2017).

Gen Z is characterized by their optimism, open-mindedness, short attention spans and preference for the internet as their primary information source. Growing up in a globalized world, they find it easy to communicate and generate action with different individuals around the world (Maioli, 2016). Moreover, they are social activists (Priporas, Stylos, & Kamenidou, 2020) that are more imaginative and risk-taking than generations before, which makes them essential in influencing purchase decisions in their families (Verma et al., 2021). Their high awareness of environmental and ethical issues prevalent
today comes from their upbringing and education. The majority of Gen Z furthers their education, which makes them aware of consumption as well as empowers them in the development of stronger attitudes towards social and environmental issues (Djafarova & Foots, 2022).

Gen Z’s willingness to spend more on ecological products (Le et al., 2020), combined with their future orientation (Prakash Yadav & Rai, 2017), interest in social responsibility (Djafarova & Foots, 2022) and concerns about issues and challenges the world is facing (Maioli, 2016) is likely to result in a paradigm shift in consumer business (Verma et al., 2021). Additionally, their enormous purchasing power (Verma et al., 2021) and their interest in being the driver of change and innovation can be seen as an important challenge for future marketing (Wood, 2013) and is thus highly likely to influence it (Verma et al., 2021). Gen Z’s rising spending power as well as information access that is digitally enhanced, makes them translate their awareness in terms of sustainability into environment-friendly and conscientious product choices (Choudhary, 2020). Companies need to adjust to this new reality since targeting Gen Z is only possible via social media, virtual friends as well as the unlimited possibilities mass communication provides (Merriam, 2015). Thus, after many years of focusing on Millennials, it is crucial for marketers to understand Gen Z and look ahead to the fastest-growing purchaser demographic (Goldring & Azab, 2020).

2.3. Marketing for Gen Z

The impact of the internet has affected consumers as well as brands and products which in turn has had more influence on the market (Vasan, 2021). As Gen Z never experienced what life looks like without the internet, being accustomed to various social media channels that majorly shaped their perspective towards information, life itself, and shopping (Thangavel, Pathak, & Chandra, 2021), they think that information shared through social media about services and products is reliable (Vasan, 2021). Gen Z is experiencing media consumption differently from previous generations and is more skeptical of traditional advertising. Instead of watching TV, they open Netflix, instead of turning on the radio, Gen Z listens to Spotify and instead of flipping through magazines, they scroll through and rely on reddit (Haenlein et al., 2020). These young adults are more informed, and therefore analyze information more deeply in relation to different concepts of green or sustainable marketing and related practices (Dragolea et al., 2023). Therefore,
companies should embrace the characteristics of Gen Z and incorporate the uniqueness of this cohort into the development of more sustainable marketing communication to support the values of diversity prevalent among these young consumers (Duffett, 2020).

Previous research has shown that promotional messages, which get shared via the internet or social media, have supported Gen Z to make purchase decisions. Promotional advertisements that get displayed on various social network sites like Facebook, YouTube or Instagram provide fundamental input about services and products, particularly to the digital natives (Vasan, 2021). Especially popular are fun based and humorous advertisements (Vasan, 2021), as ads that elicit emotions are more likely to gain Gen Z’s attention (Munsch, 2021). Additionally, the preferred social media ads contribute to an improved product perception, brand awareness, customer-business interaction, brand loyalty, and purchase intention (Ninan, Roy, & Cheriyan, 2020). On Instagram in particular, attitude toward the ad can be influenced by the design and the content of the message, whereas a positive attitude towards the product and the brand will cause Gen Z to share the message on social media (Hazari & Sethna, 2022). Hence, as getting Gen Z’s attention to any digital marketing communication is possible if the ad is short, a key factor to successfully market via social media or online tools is to make the point quickly (Munsch, 2021).

Some years ago, the shift towards the social media platforms TikTok and Instagram caused an entire industry to rise, namely social media influencers (Haenlein et al., 2020). The so-called influencers are perceived as opinion leaders, which get admired as well as respected by Gen Z and convey more credible messages (Munsch, 2021). For companies it is essential to work with honest and authentic influencers, as the digital natives of Gen Z follow social media influencers that are genuine and truly passionate about a specific area of interest (Haenlein et al., 2020). Overall, the effectiveness of an influencer is determined by a match between influencer and brand (Qian & Park, 2021), whereas a good and authentic fit increases the attitude toward the marketed product or service as well as an individual’s purchase intentions (Janssen, Schouten, & Croes, 2021). Additionally, when the influencer-brand-fit is present, the endorsement is seen as a form of personal recommendation (Kim & Kim, 2021).

Another increasingly important platform for marketing communication is YouTube, where YouTubers are considered as important information sources which use their power
to influence Gen Z’s decision-making process. Furthermore, research has shown that they positively influence their young followers in purchases by recommending certain services and products. Organizations are encouraged to upload informational and credible material with high entertainment value, as this stimulates Gen Z’s positive emotional responses. Moreover, it is recommended for organizations to employ influencers, celebrity endorsers, or YouTubers in order to create a relationship with followers via consistent interaction, which in turn fosters emotional connections and is seen as some form of branded entertainment. Their perceived reliability and trustworthiness as information source results in a favorable behavioral response and evokes positive attitudes among Gen Z consumers (Duffett, 2020).

2.4. Guiding Aspects for Gen Z’s Sustainable Decision-Making Process

With growing purchasing power, Gen Z is the influential and driving force behind social changes in the direction of a more responsible and sustainable consumption habit (Le et al., 2022). Gen Z is conscious in consumption choices (Gomes, Lopes, & Da Silva Nogueira, 2023) and has the longing to reduce consumption as well as purchase within their means and not shop unnecessarily (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). This sustainable consumption behavior in turn affects consumer satisfaction (Dragolea et al., 2023). Their attention and attitude to advertisements is seen as a significant factor in influencing purchase intention (Hazari & Sethna, 2022). Research also states that subjective norms as well as peer influence circles cause the shift in Gen Z’s sustainable consumption and thus proves the significant relationship between purchase intentions and subjective norms (Robichaud & Yu, 2021).

Gen Z’s awareness of how important it is to protect the environment is reflected in their behavior. These young adults know what positive impact their own contribution, in addition to the collective contribution of others, has in relation to protecting the environment. The awareness of this positive contribution is also a source of satisfaction for Gen Z members. Thus, research found that a relationship between an individual’s attitude towards the environment and sustainable and green consumption exists (Dragolea et al., 2023). This specific level of environmental awareness influences Gen Z’s propensity to pay a higher price in order to purchase sustainable products (Le et al., 2022). When making a purchase decision, the cohort will consider a company’s CSR information. Past research stated that, generally speaking, Gen Z is more sensitive and
focuses more on the environmental issues, but nowadays, social as well as environmental CSR are equally valued by Gen Z. They pay close of attention to a company’s social and environmental CSR activities and efforts, which makes Gen Z willing to reward brands for their efforts with a willingness to pay extra for products and services, increased brand equity, as well as higher purchase intentions (Narayanan, 2022). Additional determinants of the generation’s consumption of sustainable products are green future estimation, environmental concerns, and perceived green quality. If these are found to be sufficiently fulfilled by companies, Gen Z is more willing to pay an additional premium for the sustainable product. (Gomes et al., 2023).

Not just environmental factors and awareness of social and environmental CSR aspects affect Gen Z’s sustainable decision-making, but also having more knowledge and information about a product in general makes an individual more likely to buy it (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Furthermore, especially regarding food, on-pack information about the degree of sustainability of the product has a positive influence on Gen Z’s likelihood to purchase the sustainable product. Nevertheless, Gen Z’s skepticism is seen as an antecedent of green purchasing behavior, negatively impacting it, and making them less likely to purchase food products with diverse sustainability labels (Rossi & Rivetti, 2022).

Other crucial factors guiding Gen Z's decision to buy sustainable products is their social environment. Specifically, family, friends and peers are considered influential. It has been confirmed by research that recommendations from friends in particular are enablers for sustainable purchases (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). The influence of friends and family also plays a major role in stimulating Gen Z to make sustainable purchasing decisions (Noor et al., 2017). Likewise, peers as well as family have a significant impact on the tendency of young adults to pay more for a sustainable and eco-friendly product (Le et al., 2022). Furthermore, social media influencers have a remarkable role to play in purchase decisions. Since Gen Z interacts with influencers who share the same values and have comparable behaviors to themselves, young consumers listen to their recommendations when it comes to sustainable products and their purchase (Djafarova & Foots, 2022).

Yet, price is the main perceived barrier and biggest influence hindering Gen Z to make a sustainable consumption decision (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Research has shown that
Gen Z is, compared to generations before them, namely Gen Y and X, significantly different to them. Nevertheless, despite perceiving price as the biggest barrier, young adults are more willing to pay a higher price for sustainable and ecologically friendly products (Le et al., 2020).
3. Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter, theoretical models and theories are explained which help to understand Gen Z’s decision-making process for sustainable purchases. First, a customer decision-making model is presented, which highlights the different stages in a decision-making process and where an individual draws on their own experiences and values as well as external information in the process. This theory helps in understanding the decision process in a holistic way in order to evaluate which steps of the process are decisive and where the individual may be guided by external or internal factors. Secondly, the “information integration theory” (IIT) is elaborated on, in order to explore how an individual integrates multiple sources of information into a response. In this regard, it is interesting to see what leads an individual to put a certain weight and value on an information source and for this reason to decide which information is given higher priority, that in turn affects the response. Finally, the “green intention-behavior gap” (GIBG) is examined, which states that although people intend to purchase sustainable products, there is a contradiction in their behavior since they are not purchasing these products as frequently as they intended. It is worth exploring if Gen Z contributes to this phenomenon and if so, why that might be.

3.1. Customer Decision-Making Model

The customer decision model EBM, formerly known as EKB model developed by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, modified by Engel, Blackwell, and Minard (1990), is an explanatory model which follows the assumption that consumers are rational (Tang & Zhu, 2019). In general, the EBM model helps in understanding how individuals make decisions as well as what variables influence their decisions (Card et al., 2003). Its applicability to different situations as well as its generality made the model popular for explaining decision-making processes (Tang & Zhu, 2019). Furthermore, it takes certain steps of the consumer decision-making process into account, such as their memory, consequences of consumption and information gathering (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). The EBM model functions as a problem-solving model, which assumes that a consumer’s shopping decision is a problem-solving process (Tang & Zhu, 2019).

The model is divided into different parts, namely the information stage, decision stage as well as decision process variables (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019), in other words the factors
that affect the decision-making process (Tang & Zhu, 2019). According to the EBM model, the main aspects affecting an individual’s purchasing decision are external variables like personal differences and characteristics in addition to environmental impact factors and memories of previous experiences, also being referred to as psychological processes and procedural factors (Voramonthri & Klieb, 2019; Komatsu, Watanabe, & Fukuchi, 2021). A consumer's decision process consists of different sequential phases: need recognition, search of information, alternative evaluation, the choice to purchase, followed by the post purchase reflection (Voramonthri & Klieb, 2019). The different stages are described in the paragraphs below.

The need recognition stage is the first step in the decision process. It is regarded as the trigger which initiates a purchase decision and is the originating stage of the following consumer-initiated activities like information search as well as evaluation and purchase. Establishing a need for purchasing depends on varied individual characteristics (Voramonthri & Klieb, 2019).

Secondly, the information search phase starts with research into memory to see if enough is already known about available options in order to make a choice. If the result is insufficient, external search is needed to supplement already existing knowledge and continues until enough information is gathered. External search is undertaken through personal sources like family and friends, commercial sources like advertisements and public media sources like the internet (Voramonthri & Klieb, 2019).

Next, once sufficient information is gathered, alternatives get evaluated and assessed. The processes of information search and evaluation of alternatives are intertwined, which makes consumers go back and forth between them. The evaluation includes the selection of evaluative criteria and alternatives choices. After their determination, the considered choices get compared using the individual criteria and subsequently, decision rules get applied to narrow down the different alternatives to make a decision. This stage also leads individuals to form attitudes, beliefs, and intentions which in turn lead to the purchasing stage (Voramonthri & Klieb, 2019).

The purchase decision is the final selection or choice made in terms of which product to buy. Generally, purchase is a function of individual situations, environmental influences,
and intentions. Influences for the final action include available time for decision-making, retail environment, and information availability (Voramonti & Klieb, 2019).

Lastly, post-purchase reflection includes the evaluation of a product’s performance. In a subjective evaluation, outcomes get compared to expectations and result in either satisfaction, neutral response, or dissatisfaction (Voramonti & Klieb, 2019).

3.2. Information Integration Theory

Norman H. Anderson proposed the information integration theory (IIT) in 1971 and tries to explain how multiple variables get integrated and formed into one unitary response (Anderson, 2013), so how different cues get combined in order to get a unified impression (Schlottmann & Anderson, 1993). Generally speaking, every action and thought results from combined operations of multiple variables (Anderson, 2013). Thus, the theory focuses on the evaluation of unobservable psychological processes which are involved in making judgements that are complex (Anderson, 1971, 2013; Schlottmann & Anderson, 1993). Its applications have ranged from psycho-physical judgment to personality impression formation and decision-making (Anderson, 1971).

A general concept of the theory is that each piece of information has two different parameters: a value and a weight. Value can be described as the position of the informational stimulus on the judgment dimension while weight represents the psychological importance of each piece of information. Thus, it is evident that both weight and value depend on the individual in combination with the dimension of judgment. The same information might have different importance and value on different dimensions, also for different people on the same dimension (Anderson, 1971).

The theory has two fundamental operations: valuation and integration. The valuation stage involves the measurement and determinants of the value and weight parameters. Integration contains different ways of how several stimuli are combined (Anderson, 1971). During the stage of valuation, an individual places weight on every presented stimulus. Throughout the integration stage, those stimuli are either averaged, added, or multiplied together, using each stimuli’s weight in order to get an integrated response. In short, for every task that requires a response, multiple stimuli need to be symbolized as psychological value (valuation function). Afterwards, those stimuli are combined into one
single psychological response (integration function) which gets transformed into a visible response (response function) (Carroll, 1982).

Figure 1 describes the process of information integration graphically. The valuation operation transforms a stimulus S into a subjective representation s. The integration function transforms the subjective stimuli into one implicit internal response r. Afterwards, the response function transforms the implicit response into an observable response R.

![Information Integration Diagram](image)

**Figure 1:** Information Integration Diagram; from Anderson (1991): Informational stimuli (S) get transformed into subjective representations (s) and afterwards integrated into one implicit internal response (r), which, in a further process, results in an observable response (R).

3.3. The Green Intention-Behavior Gap Model

The attitude-intention-behavior gap is a phenomenon in which an individual’s intention does not align with their behavior (ElHaffar et al., 2020). This gap is closely associated with the theory of planned behavior which suggests that attitude is a significant influencer of human behavior which is mediated by one’s intentions (Ajzen, 1991). However, it has emerged as a well-documented phenomena in terms of “green consumption” or the purchasing of products that are environmentally friendly. This concept has various names in the literature but for this research it will be referred to as “the green intention-behavior gap” (GIBG). It suggests that although there is a significant increase in the number of consumers who intend to make sustainable purchases, many do not ultimately purchase the product that is deemed to be more sustainable (ElHaffar et al., 2020). Instead, most
consumers continue to make purchasing decisions based on price, quality, convenience, and brand recognition (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Weatherellet al., 2003).

3.4. Theoretical Model

In order to understand Gen Z’s decision-making process for sustainable purchases on a holistic level, we propose a model, which is represented in Figure 2, that is based on the Engel, Blackwell, and Minard decision-making model and includes IIT and the GIBG. In Gen Z’s decision-making process, we propose that the information search, the evaluation of alternatives as well as the final purchase decision can be synthesized using the IIT. To make a decision, an individual searches for external as well as internal information, represented in informational stimuli. Each individual stimulus, which consists of weight and value that are dependent on the individual and their dimension of judgment (Anderson, 1971), gets evaluated into a subjective representation by the IIT valuation function. After weighing every subjective representation, the integration function brings the different stimuli together and forms one implicit internal response. Those processes are thus comparable to the alternative evaluation phase of the decision process, as this stage is all about assessing and evaluating alternative choices with the help of evaluative criteria. Narrowing down the alternatives is done through individual decision rules, which reflect personal criteria (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). The observable response evolves from the response function and finally results in the purchase decision.

Additionally, the GIBG feeds into the influencing variables of the EBM model, the decision process variables, seen in Figure 2, as in the first stage of the GIBG model, subjective norms, attitude towards green consumption, as well as attitude towards the environment are the basis of green consumption intentions. Thus, the GIBG attitudes can be connected to the individual differences of the EBM model and subjective norms resulting from the interplay between environmental influences and individual differences. As described above, the influencing variables affect individuals in the different rational decision process stages and now, with the integrated GIBG and IIT, we argue that factors of the GIBG also feed into the information processing and valuation stages of the IIT. An individual's attitudes towards green consumption or the environment could possibly determine whether or not a certain informational stimulus gets weighed more than another and thus drives the response into a certain direction. Therefore, the observable response according to the IIT can be argued to be equal to the green consumption behavior from
the GIBG, if the interplay between the different stages of the different models and theories are taken into account. Thus, we believe that the models are interconnected and supplement each other when it comes to decision-making for sustainable purchases, which is why a visual representation, integrating IIT and GIBG in EBM, was proposed.

**Figure 2:** Theoretical Model: Working Hypothesis; basic structure and components of the EBM model (Information Process, Decision Process, and Influencing Variables) adapted from Komatsu, Watanabe, and Fukuchi (2021), IIT presented in Figure 1 from Anderson (1991) and GIBG Model from H. T. Nguyen, Nguyen, and Moang (2019): IIT model synthesizes information search, evaluation of alternatives and final purchasing decision of the EBM model, GIBG feeds into the influencing variables of the EBM model, which in turn has an effect on different decision process stages and thus also the IIT. This shows the interconnectedness of the three models and theories.
4. Methodology

The following chapter explains the research method, research design, data collection and data analysis in detail. Then, the identification of limitations, reliability and validity of the study is discussed.

Method and Research Design

The above-mentioned research questions, which aim to understand Gen Z’s sustainable decision-making process, lead us to a qualitative research method. A qualitative research method is needed since we want to understand how Gen Z consumers make sustainable purchasing decisions and what guides them to decide. This approach helps in gaining a more comprehensive and detailed perspective on Gen Z’s decision-making process, possible influences, and specific attitudes. In qualitative research, the focus lies on acquiring data through open-ended as well as conversational communication (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The qualitative method chosen for this research is semi-structured interviews. This type of interview gives researchers the chance to observe an interviewee’s reactions as well as to hear their answer in their own words and authentically. Furthermore, it provides researchers with some flexibility to cross-check respondents' statements without altering the structure of the interview (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Semi-structured interviews also help to keep participants more actively engaged (Roulston & Choi, 2018), which in turn allows interviewees to build upon their primary ideas and investigate reasons why the participant hold these views, to gain more profound insights (Braun, Clarke, Boulton, Davey, & McEvoy, 2020).

Members of the Gen Z cohort will be interviewed through semi-structured interviews. To better understand their decision-making, this type of interview was chosen because it allows for flexibility by deciding on important questions and key themes such as sustainable consumption, information sources, role of relationships, social media, or personal values. By choosing this interview method, it allows for additional previously unknown themes to emerge. Set, open-ended questions were used in order to explore Gen Z’s sustainable decision-making process. A detailed interview guide (see Appendix) was established and tested in advance to avoid possible misunderstandings and errors. This enabled the creation of a dependable guide in order to attain credible data results. The interview questions were outlined using the previously mentioned theories, EBM
customer decision model, information integration theory and green intention-behavior gap model. With the help of the interviews, primary data was collected, which is, due to the detailed interview guide with questions outlined using mentioned theories, specifically targeted to answer the research questions with in-depth information.

The starting point of the data collection was a convenience sample of the generational cohort Gen Z. At the time this research was conducted, according to the definition of Francis and Hoefel (2018) in which individuals of Gen Z are born between 1995 and 2010, Gen Z are aged between 28 and 13. For the study, a sample size of 10, with both female and male aged 21-28 have been chosen to be interviewed in the process, as individuals under 18 require consent from their parents which would make collecting data risky. All of the participants were identified through the researchers’ contacts and subsequently approached via personal communication. Criteria for selecting the participants were nationality, age, and interest in sustainability. Every individual initially contacted chose to participate. According to the generational cohort theory by Inglehart (1977), the geographical limitation of the study is meaningful. As different values and significant events shape different generations (Inglehart, 1977), geographical separation is essential due to different events happening around the globe on each continent. Thus, this research just focuses on individuals who grew up in Europe.

Due to different geographical locations of the researchers and the participants for the study, all interviews were conducted using the software Zoom. The software made it possible to record the interviews, which helped the natural conversation flow. After the data collection was completed, interviews were transcribed to help the subsequently conducted thematic analysis of the data findings. In order to adhere to ethical procedures, participants needed to sign a consent form before taking part in the study where, in addition, the research topic was introduced.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was used to understand the participants' views, knowledge, opinions, behaviors, values, and information processes. This type of analysis was chosen as it is a flexible, accessible as well as increasingly popular method for the analysis of qualitative data. Overall, thematic analysis aims at identifying patterns which helps in understanding respondents’ views, knowledge, values, or behaviors (Braun,
According to Braun et al. (2019), themes can be viewed as the reflection of a pattern of common meaning, which is organized around a main idea or concept. Thus, themes also unite data which may otherwise appear disparate, same as meanings that might occur in varied and multiple contexts (Braun et al., 2019). To identify common patterns and generate detailed and meaningful themes which come up frequently and repeatedly from the respondents, the researchers thoroughly examined the obtained data, following the grounded theory process. The inductive data analysis process used Braun and Clarke’s six-phase approach (familiarization, initial coding, search for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, producing the report) as a guideline (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After familiarization with the data obtained from the European Gen Z sample, done by highlighting phrases in the interview transcripts and taking notes, initial codes were generated. First order codes could be identified in the second step of the data analysis process. This step was followed by the search for themes and conceptual categories across the data, with keeping in mind the selected theories described in Section 3 of the paper. As the EBM customer decision model is a rational model, codes that fall in the rational section of decision-making were combined. Thus, the category “Rational” includes the themes “Trusted Third Party Experts”, “Accessibility & Availability”, and “Information & Education”, which are important components of the rational decision process of customers. Second, in regard to the IIT, which focuses on the integration of information which gets weighed and integrated by individuals based on their values, value-based codes were collected under the respective umbrella term. The category summarizes the themes “Individual Sustainability Philosophies”, “Experience”, “Social Environment”, “Brand, Reputation & Relationship”, “Aspects of Supply Chain”, and “Quality & Durability”, as the interpretation and importance of each theme depends on the individual and their values. Lastly, codes that fall under the GIBG were summarized under the category “Intention” which includes themes that explain what could possibly hinder or why individuals do not purchase sustainable items. “Aesthetics”, “Price”, “Lack of Regulations”, “Skepticism”, and “Lack of Transparency” are the intention-based themes that are deemed to be relevant for addressing the gap. Thus, after regrouping the codes into 14 themes, they were divided into the three previously mentioned categories, according to the theories they are based on. Lastly the analysis was structured and written up, producing a report.
Limitations of the study

In the research process, certain limitations came to light. First, there are challenges to broad generalization due to the geographical focus and cultural differences. As mentioned above, each cohort is shaped by certain major events, different factors as well as diverse movements that happened during the time individuals of a generation grew up. However, there are similarities because the generation of digital natives grew up connected around the globe, which makes everything everyone’s problem, thus they know what happens in other parts of the world. Second, due to the fact that the youngest individuals of Gen Z are just 13 years old and would need parental consent in order to participate in the study, which is why they were not selected, results do not represent the youngest individuals of Gen Z in Europe. This might have an effect on the results, as all respondents are over 21 years old and thus have a certain education level, as all participants are currently pursuing higher education, and may have differing values, beliefs, and knowledge. Third, selected participants claim to understand and care about sustainability. This aspect is taken into account in the analysis and discussion of the results, as the awareness and importance of sustainability for individuals of this generation differs. Lastly, as sustainability is such a complex, overwhelming, and relevant topic nowadays, respondents might not tell the truth about their genuine feelings and sustainable purchasing behavior in order to be perceived as more sustainable and adhere to certain sustainability standards. Society wants people to act sustainably and incorporate sustainability in purchasing decisions, which is why people might feel ashamed when telling the truth about their purchasing behavior, if this is not according to the sustainability standards of the society. In order to prevent this from happening, participants were asked how they define sustainability and what it means to them, to understand if they act according to their perceived sustainability standards and definition.

Reliability & Validity

Reliability criteria concerns replicability of the study, meaning whether or not future researchers could possibly repeat present research and produce the same results as well as interpretations and claims (Silverman, 2015). To make qualitative research more reliable, Moisander and Valtonen (2006) propose two ways in order to reassure reliability, namely describing the research process transparently and guaranteeing theoretical transparency. The study describes the research process transparently and in detail,
highlighting the research strategy, selection of participants, data collection, as well as the data analysis method used. Additionally, the theoretical framework is explained in a detailed manner, which makes the theoretical stance for the interpretation of the interview data explicit as well as shows how particular interpretations get produced and consequently, others excluded. Furthermore, it is important that each participant understands the interview questions in the same way as well as that answers can get coded without the likelihood of uncertainty (Silverman, 2015). In order to ensure this, the interview guide got pre-tested, interviewers got trained and two independent coders assessed derived themes to evaluate inter-coder reliability as well as ensure agreement on the process of coding to clarify the coding process and achieve transparency. Those aspects make present research reliable and eliminates the possibility for future research to come up with identical results.

To ensure validity of a qualitative study, a common method is respondent validation (Silverman, 2015). After the coding process, results of the present study were sent to all participants to verify the findings. In this process, participants were asked to give feedback on the results proposed by the researchers. With the agreement of the respondents, more confidence about the validity of the findings is given.
5. Analysis

This chapter starts with a presentation of a descriptive overview of the data. Subsequently, the findings of the study are presented which are divided into different sections, according to the theories used for the analysis, in order to have a structured and clear overview over the diverse results of the study.

5.1. Descriptive Data Overview

The selected participants were all part of the cohort Generation Z, ranging between the age of 21 and 28. Their countries of origin represented three different countries, namely Germany (seven participants), Ireland (two participants) and Greece (one participant). Seven out of 10 participants identify themselves as female, three as male and none indicating as other. Each individual is currently enrolled at a university, pursuing higher education in different fields of study. All participants shared that they are interested in sustainability and expressed their interest in sustainable consumption in order to live according to their own definition of sustainability which was initially discussed at the beginning of the interview. Their education about sustainability mostly came from higher education, but also from school when they were younger, family, friends, and individual interests. Each of the participants had excellent command of English, even if English was not their first language as was true in many cases. Given this, the participants easily understood interview questions and overall communication between interviewers and interviewees was effective.

In relation to the theories and concepts used for the analysis of the results, the obtained data covers every step of Gen Z’s decision-making process, from need recognition to the post-purchase reflection, which is theoretically framed by the EBM customer decision model. The careful selection of the interview questions made it possible to understand the overall process the individuals go through to make a sustainable purchasing decision as well as the cognitive processes and the internal dialogues they face. With additional questions regarding information search and individual purchasing criteria, it is possible to evaluate how much weight and value an individual puts on a certain informational stimulus, and what finally leads them to the ultimate decision, thus referring to the information integration theory. With the help of questions regarding the motivation to make more sustainable purchases, it was possible to evaluate what would drive as well as
hinder the Gen Z sample to make more sustainable purchases and therefore turn their sustainable intentions into actual behaviors.

5.2. Findings of the Study

In the following section, the findings of the study are presented. Figure 3 gives an overview of how the findings are organized in relation to the theories - customer decision-making model (EBM), information integration theory (IIT), and the green intention-behavior gap model (GIBG). As the EBM model is considered to be a rational model, the “Rational” category includes findings that guide the rational, logical decision process. The IIT is value-based, hence the “Value-Based” category covers findings that are related to personal values, and the GIBG model is focused on intention, being an umbrella term for findings that could possibly hinder individuals to turn intentions into actions.

5.2.1. Rational Aspects based on the EBM Decision-Making Model

The rational EBM decision model gives an overview about the logical steps an individual goes through when making their purchasing decisions. Thus, based on the qualitative data, findings that fit under the rational category are listed and described below. Specifically, the stages of information search, evaluation of alternatives as well as the
final purchasing decision were found to be the most critical for Gen Z, whereas, according to the data, “Trusted Third Party Experts”, “Accessibility & Availability” and “Information & Education” were the most present in Generation Z.

**Trusted Third Party Experts**

The participants of the study frequently mentioned the use of trusted, third-party experts which occurs in the information search stage in the EBM theory. Since sustainable consumers are inundated with information, have a longer decision-making process than other consumers, and feel they need to conduct extensive research to determine if the product is sustainable, they often use trusted experts to help simplify their process. “I love it when there are stores that are already sustainable. They do this background check on suppliers, our materials are only from here and then I can walk in the store and because they’ve pre-audited for me in a way or filtering these decisions that I align with. So I love it when I have those few stores where I’m like okay, I can go here for these things and I know that it’s sustainable...socially, environmentally, economically sound. So then it’s super easy and I usually spend way too much money at those stores.” (P4).

Many of the participants noted the use of trusted third-party experts helps make their decision process easier.

**Accessibility & Availability**

Two issues participants cited during their search for sustainable products include accessibility of sustainable products and their availability. This mostly occurs in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the EBM theory. Participant six shared: “I think it’s especially difficult sometimes when you want to buy a product in the store, but you just find the sustainable product online even though you would prefer to buy things in a store to support the local economy...or to have less waste (because of shipping).” Though they have an intention to purchase sustainable goods, participants become frustrated by their lack of widespread availability in stores. Participants deem shopping locally as a more sustainable option rather than shipping products, which creates waste and produces unneeded carbon dioxide due to transportation.

**Information & Education**

The topics of information and education are complex for participants. All of those interviewed mentioned information processing during their decision-making process:
either the need for them to educate themselves on industries and products, to the lack of easily accessible sustainable product information, to comparing information from different sources to pick the most sustainable product. In relation to the EBM model, this falls under the information search phase and is intertwined with the alternate evaluation phase as consumers go back and forth between these two phases. The participants felt as though they needed to spend significant time educating themselves about products to help them determine which factors to consider when deciding if a product is sustainable or not. Participant eight shared that they: “...often look at Youtube reviews for information,” and that they are often “...asking friends specialized in a specific field.” Participants also expressed that processing information and educating themselves can lead to negative experiences. “Our world is so information driven to then have even more information that you have, it’s just too much and it’s so overwhelming, it’s called option fatigue, when there’s so many options and information.” (P4). This sense of exhaustion from searching for and processing information makes shopping sustainably a challenge for consumers who want to shop in line with their values. Another participant describes a combination of their own trusted knowledge they already possess as well as external research to understand the background of a product. “I like would always, always, always do my own sort of research into the background of it. (The purchase) usually comes down to my own understanding of what is sustainable and what’s not sustainable.” (P10). This allows them to be satisfied that they have gone through a process to find the most sustainable product.

5.2.2. Value-Based Aspects based on the Information Integration Theory

The value-based IIT is a significant component of the study, as the research sample of Gen Z puts a lot of emphasis on collecting information about a product, specifically for bigger purchases. Individual values guide customers in their decisions, especially when it comes to integrating information. They are evaluating which informational stimuli to trust and thus put weight and value on every single stimulus whereas the weight and value depend on the individual’s judgment and values. Afterwards, the stimuli are either added, averaged, or multiplied to be able to form an integrated response - the final purchasing decision. Therefore, this category includes the value-based themes derived from the qualitative data “Individual Sustainability Philosophies”, “Experience”, “Social Environment”, “Brand, Reputation & Relationship”, “Aspects of Supply Chain”, and “Quality & Durability”. 
Individual Sustainability Philosophies

Part of the decision-making process for the participants involves checking in with themselves if the purchase aligns with their values and beliefs. One such sustainable value that was observed through interviews was the concept of anti-consumerism. Nine out of 10 interview participants explicitly shared that they limit themselves in terms of consumption - whether that is with only sustainable products, second-hand items, repairing items they already own, or by only purchasing a small number of new items. “There are enough sweaters (available) secondhand and also in your friend’s wardrobes where you can just swap.” (P2). Their comment suggests that there is no need to purchase new products, sustainable or not, and that the most sustainable option is to not contribute to consumerism and purchase reused items. Participant nine frequently repairs products that are broken or not suitable for use anymore, saying that “Fixing it myself is my first go to, then sometimes I would go to a service that fixes stuff.”. Three of the participants explicitly stated they limit themselves to only three or five new items annually. They claimed this limitation was encouraged by peer inspiration or by a book they read. The underlying belief is that they equate consuming less or differently with a healthier planet and this suggests that they are living in alignment with their value of sustainability which has an effect on the need recognition phase in the decision process.

Other sustainable philosophies participants claimed to practice include slow shopping and vegetarianism. “I’m a vegetarian…because I don’t want to support the (meat) industry.” (P1). Because they perceive the meat industry as unsustainable, they chose to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle and consistently avoid meat products and instead purchase only plant-based products. A few of the participants shared that they approach consumption in an intentional way and part of that process involves reflecting on what they already have to avoid impulsive purchases. “It’s essentially a belief that I have everything I need already.” (P9). If the participants encounter an item they either need or want, they have an internal dialogue that slows down the purchasing process. “…I usually do not buy it (immediately)...so I try to sit for a while and to rethink if I really need this product or maybe find a better product within the timeframe. So it’s not a very impulsive purchase.” (P6). This style of slow purchasing gives the consumer an opportunity to reflect before making a purchasing decision to determine if the product is truly needed and gives them a chance to perhaps find a product that is more sustainable and therefore better aligned with their values. By reusing materials such as clothing through the secondary market,
repairing an item instead of throwing it away, or reflecting on what is truly needed before making a purchasing decision, an individual is decreasing waste. Participants all make lifestyle sacrifices because they understand the gravity of climate change and its risks for both the planet and people. They have made intentional decisions to change their lifestyles because of their sustainable values.

**Experience**

Sustainability is a value that all participants shared was important to them during the interviews. When the participant felt as though the purchase they made was sustainable, they reported feeling positive emotions. “If I purchase something sustainable or more sustainable, it just makes me feel so good….that’s like kinda balancing the higher price.” (P1). This participant shared that although the price premium often associated with sustainable products can feel unfair, it is balanced out by the feeling that they were able to behave in a way that was aligned with their values. Participant five shared, “You feel so much joy afterwards that it even looks better.” After making a sustainable purchase, they experience the feeling of joy which is so profound that it can alter the way the product looks in their perception. This is connected to the post-purchase reflection phase of the EBM model, as the consumer registers satisfaction with their purchasing decision which is then integrated into their memory. For future purchases, the consumer will recall the memory of a satisfied purchase, perhaps increasing the probability of a repeated sustainable purchase.

**Social Environment**

The power of one’s social circle, including family and friends, is apparent in the participants' decision-making process. “Usually the first place I check is with friends to be honest. I think friends and family are often what I trust most.” (P9). This shows that it is instinctual for certain participants to first consult those they trust within their social network. Because of the inherent trust within those relationships, the participants will often heed these recommendations and make the purchase that was suggested.

**Brand, Reputation & Relationship**

A way to circumvent some of the labor for information search that participants go through during the decision-making process is by supporting a trusted brand. If the participant had purchased multiple products they deemed to be sustainable from a brand or if the brand’s
reputation was exceptional, they were more likely to purchase from this brand again. “Another factor is the reputation of the brand... It’s not about oh look he’s wearing this brand that’s super cool... It’s more about that the brand isn’t going to let me down, just that it’s going to last.” (P10). Brands that are able to build trust with their sustainable customers through aspects like durability, quality, and transparency are more likely to attract more like-minded consumers. Participants also shared that they were willing to end their long-lasting relationships with brands that are no longer aligned with their value of sustainability. Although they may trust the quality of a particular product and have been using it for a long time, they decided to take the time to find a new version of an everyday product that was more sustainable. “But now since my view of the world and for sustainability has developed further, I really want to like, step up the game, like in my consumption. So I just pick out some areas and then try to make them sustainable...so as soon as a product is empty or finished, I try to find a better product instead.” (P1). This suggests that this participant is so committed to their values, they are willing to put extra effort forward to finding a new product that is sustainable.

Aspects of Supply Chain

For the participants, part of what they consider in their decision-making process for purchasing sustainable items are different aspects of the supply chain in relation to their value of sustainability. This includes: the material the product is made from, how it was made, by whom, and how it is packaged and shipped to them. For example, Participant nine shared: “If there’s a sustainable option that is really nice but it’s produced in South America, then shipping it over here immediately makes it a non-sustainable option for me.”. Three other participants cited shipping products as something they try to avoid because they also understand this to be unsustainable. In addition to shipping, the packaging a product comes in is also evaluated, “I would really look hard to find a store that doesn’t have plastic...and trying to reduce my plastics has been something I really have been wanting to work on.” (P4). These consumers look beyond the product itself to consider how the product is packaged and where the product is coming from, specifically where they are able to access it. One participant shared their thoughts about considering the supply chain in their purchasing decisions. “I’m terrified to even ask the question, it can get very dark, the further you go back into the (supply) chain.” (P5). This comment suggests that this participant believes there are aspects of the supply chain, especially at
the raw materials stage that likely involved human-rights abuses and environmental exploitation.

**Quality & Durability**

Many of the participants said they equate the quality and durability of a product as an important signifier of sustainability. The perception behind this is that if a product is considered to be well made and has the potential of lasting for a long time into the future, it will decrease the need for replacement or repair, which ultimately helps to decrease consumption and waste. Participant nine stated: “I’m pretty happy with buying decisions like a long time after, if I realized things last forever and still use them. I have this (product) that I’ve been using for about 12 years now and that may have been the best purchase I’ve ever made. Yeah, that’s a goal right? To like buy something that you can use for a lifetime.” Participants weigh quality and durability in the decision-making process as a facet of sustainability.

5.2.3. Intentional Aspects based on the Green Intention-Behavior Gap Model

In relation to the intention-based green intention-behavior gap model (GIGB), participants shared numerous intentional factors, which are summarized below. The intention to purchase sustainably was clearly communicated across the sample population. However, there were a variety of instances in which they would or could not shop in line with this intention. The respective themes “Aesthetics”, “Price”, “Lack of Regulations”, “Skepticism”, and “Lack of Transparency” are further elaborated in the following section.

**Aesthetics**

Multiple participants expressed that aesthetics, or the beauty of a product, are important to them when making purchasing decisions. Participant five described a product they wanted to purchase, sharing the following: “I wanted a (product) from the moment I saw it, it was, you know, it’s beautiful.”. It also expressed that while this was something they desired to own, and it was not necessarily a “sustainable product”, they still made the decision to purchase it because it was something meaningful to them. The way a product looks influences the way the consumer feels and by shopping because of aesthetics, it shows that looks are important to them or have some sort of connection to their personal brand.
Price

All participants noted that price is a factor in their sustainable decision-making. There are a number of ways price was discussed: participants often associated a higher price for a sustainable product known as a “price premium” and that they are often willing to pay it. However, a large differential in price between sustainable and non-sustainable products made it difficult for them to purchase, as the participants had to be price conscious because all of them are students. “It’s a matter of price...if there’s a way bigger price differential between the sustainable and unsustainable, then I’ll go for whatever fits in with the budget.” (P10). Thus, price is perceived as valuable information for a sustainable product, which gets weighed accordingly and therefore affects the participants decision of whether or not to purchase the sustainable option.

Lack of regulations

Participants cited that a lack of regulations in relation to labeling or word usage is what makes it challenging for them to purchase sustainably. A product can have “this product is sustainable” printed on it which is not regulated by any governing body to confirm the claim. Participant four shared: “And you really need to read through the fine print and do your research because you can buy something that says it's sustainable and it’s the complete opposite.”. Given that companies are permitted to make misleading claims about a product’s sustainability, it breeds distrust between companies and consumers, fueling skepticism. “It's just a little bit more of a sort of a regulation, I think, around claims that are being made and you don’t feel like you’re being swindled every time.” (P10). This distrust ultimately leads to sustainable consumers choosing another product.

Skepticism

All of the participants expressed that they have high levels of skepticism when it comes to companies making claims that they are sustainable or the products that they produce are sustainable. “I’m aware of the fact of greenwashing. Because I know that you can always put things from a more positive image or from a more negative image.” (P1). Greenwashing, or the practice of companies claiming that a product is green or sustainable when in fact it is not, is something that all participants mentioned during their interviews. This distrust makes them skeptical of a product or brand’s claim that it is sustainable, which typically requires the participant to dig deeper to find out if the claim is true. Additionally, they expressed high levels of skepticism toward large multi-national
companies that are inherently unsustainable due to their business model (i.e., fast fashion). This overall distrust makes the participants critical consumers, willing to explore as many details about the product/companies as possible, to weigh whether or not they are sustainable.

Lack of Transparency

Transparency around the product and brand is important for Gen Z, and there is a general sense that many brands are not transparent enough, thus increasing skepticism. Participant eight shared: “Having transparent information from the company that would guarantee that they’re actually doing what they’re saying.” In order to trust a product or brand, these participants would like to be able to see all of the facts around the product to inform their decisions.
6. Discussion

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews with Gen Z show that each individual goes through a complex process to make decisions, especially in terms of aligning their sustainability values with the decision-making process. Gen Z includes a vast number of aspects in their sustainable decisions in order to make the most suitable decision according to their own definition of sustainability. In the following, the two main objectives of the study get discussed and compared to previous research. Afterwards, the relationship between the rational, value-based and intention categories is examined.

Objective one:

To understand what guides Gen Z’s decision-making process for sustainable purchases.

Initially, the need recognition stage immediately causes internal dialogues for participants. For example, they often ask themselves if they really need the product or not, which is guided by individual (sustainability) values. The results indicate that the majority of respondents are trying to reduce their consumption, which is in line with previous research, highlighting that Gen Z does not like to shop unnecessary (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Additionally, for many participants, one of the first and most trusted information sources were friends, family, peers, and perceived experts in their fields, which supports previous studies of Robichaud and Yu (2021) and Djafarova and Foots (2022). Another information source found is information in stores themselves. Products and their packaging get examined and compared with each other. Participants also mentioned looking at logos and certificates, which is typically connected to a degree of skepticism surrounding claims and missing regulations for the use of sustainability terms. This is in line with previous research about on-pack sustainability information and the skepticism that comes with it. (Rossi & Rivetti, 2022).

When it comes to information collection online, individuals go through a thoughtful search process in order to find sufficient as well as trustworthy information to make a sustainable purchase. The main online information source is a company’s website, where Gen Z not only looks for product specific information, but additionally collects information about the overall environmental and social sustainability of a company,
which confirms previous studies saying that nowadays, Gen Z values social and environmental sustainability to an equal extent (Narayanan, 2022). Moreover, specific supply chain aspects, like location of manufacturing and shipping, get researched, which are crucial for some respondents to evaluate the degree of sustainability of a product. Further sources for information are google searches, third party comparison websites, and specific sustainable online shops the participants already know.

Social media use is another topic currently discussed in relation to Gen Z. For example, results from this study have shown that ads on Instagram are perceived as entry points for a purchase, which nevertheless gets researched in an additional process to verify the claims made by the advertisements. This demonstrates that the sustainably-minded Gen Z sample is resistant towards impulse purchases. Moreover, Instagram gets used for inspirational purposes rather than for the search of hard facts which could be the case because Instagram is a highly visual social media platform and participants ask for true, hard facts around sustainability information. Previous research found that promotional ads especially on social networking sites provide crucial input about products for Gen Z (Vasan, 2021), which cannot be fully supported by this study, as findings show that the Gen Z cohort sample always conducts individual backup research on information displayed in the ads. Other highlighted online information platforms are YouTube, that gets used for collecting product specific information in order to educate themselves on product characteristics, and Reddit, for getting an initial overview about products and opinions as well as reviews from different people, including perceived experts in specific fields. Generally, the study participants seek accurate, honest, and transparent information about products and business practices and look for more information, when they are skeptical about a company’s claims, which supports existing research (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017).

For many respondents, factors of quality and durability play an important role for sustainability, as a long-lasting product aligns with their definition of sustainability. The reason being that if a product can last for a long time, it does not require replacement, which equates to more consumption and the creation of waste. There is also a connection between an individual’s relationship with the brand, as many participants mentioned that they tend to buy the same brand. They trust these brands and their products since they adhere to a certain level of sustainability standards as well as for quality and durability.
Another main decision variable is individual knowledge and education. Many participants shared that they trust their understanding of sustainability and base their judgment of a product on that. The knowledge was gained through education, family, school, peer circles as well as media (books, documentaries). Sustainable awareness and knowledge have a positive influence on sustainable decisions and purchasing behavior, which was also found by previous studies (Soomro, Mirani, Ali, & Marvi, 2020). The interplay between education, knowledge, and information search is crucial for Gen Z to determine that they purchased an item that is truly sustainable, with some of the participants arguing it is not possible to know whether or not the most sustainable decision was made. Nevertheless, transparent information, knowledge about a product, and individual sustainability awareness drives Gen Z to sustainable purchases. They are willing to pay a price premium for more sustainable options due to their own confidence around their individual research and knowledge. This is in line with previous research (Djafarova & Foots, 2022; Le et al., 2022). This in turn affects customer’s satisfaction, as purchasing sustainably is perceived as a good thing to do and makes individuals happy, which could be due to the fact that individuals align their sustainable philosophies with sustainable purchases with the same result being found by Dragolea et al. (2023).

As part of Gen Z’s sustainable decision-making, further variables play a major role in the process, such as accessibility and availability. Many individuals stated that the lack of sustainable options in shops makes it hard to purchase in line with their values, for example shopping online for the more sustainable option makes it less sustainable due to shipping. Scarce availability of sustainable products was also one of the major findings by Barbarossa and Pastore (2014), researching why conscious consumers do not buy sustainable products. Further barriers to sustainable purchases are aesthetics, price, lack of regulations, skepticism, and lack of transparency, which are discussed below.

**Objective two:**

*To explore how Gen Z makes decisions in relation to the green intention-behavior gap.*

All participants clearly highlighted their intention to buy sustainable products all the time. However, there are a number of main factors which hinder individuals to turn intention into actual purchasing behavior. The most important aspect for all individuals was price.
Sustainable products are more cost intensive than non-sustainable options which makes Gen Z, especially when it comes to daily-use products like food, unable to buy the sustainable option all the time. This could be the case because Gen Z in general is still a young generation, thus they possibly might not have enough savings or income to afford the price premium, especially when it is perceived as rather high. Previous research also identified price as a major barrier for sustainable purchases (Barbarossa & Pastore, 2014; Djavarova & Foots, 2022). Additionally, participants cited that they often encounter a significant cost differential between sustainable and non-sustainable products and will not purchase the sustainable product in this instance. The perception being that the cost is unreasonable, and they do not purchase based on this principle.

Furthermore, some participants highlighted missing aesthetics for sustainable products. While functionality and sustainability are ranked higher by participants, some felt that sometimes the way a product looks is more important in certain instances. This underpins the fact that Gen Z still wants to be perceived as on trend. For example, by following the latest trends in the fashion industry.

Every participant shared the skepticism they have for claims that companies make. There seems to be an association between big corporations and unsustainable behavior, which was highlighted by many of the respondents. This association might be because of the usually complex and interconnected supply chains, involving a lot of stakeholders around the world, producing large amounts of products, targeted for different seasons and new collections every year. Gen Z demands accurate information behind practices of companies and thus feel the urge to research and look for relevant information, if the information needed is not given in a transparent and clear way, which supports the findings of Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017). Nevertheless, they sometimes get overwhelmed by the amount of information out there, as it is hard to filter information and are thus skeptical about what to trust. If Gen Z doubts information just a little bit and thus categorizes it as greenwashing, the sample tends to not buy the product. This concurs with previous research saying that greenwashing has a negative effect on purchasing intentions (T. H. O. Nguyen, Yang, Nguyen, Johnson, & Cao, 2019). Doubt also arises with unregulated terms, which every company could possibly print on their products. The lack of regulations in combination with feeling overwhelmed and skeptical about information leaves Gen Z confused and calls for more clarity in terms of the usage of
certain wording and general, understandable, and precise sustainability regulations that communicate sustainability information transparently. Because of these factors, there is still a gap between Gen Z’s intentions to buy sustainable products and their actual purchasing behavior.

Relationship between Rational, Value-Based and Intention
Looking at the results through the lens of the theoretical model, the working hypothesis, described in Section 3.4., it can be seen that there is no clear-cut gap between the rational, value-based and intention aspects. According to the Gen Z sample and the perceptions of how participants talked about the process they are going through when making a decision, it is possible to say that values play a significant role in their daily life and thus are also important for decisions they make. Particularly when it comes to sustainability, each individual has their own definition of how they live, which in turn is strongly influenced by values. Hence, it is possible to say that even logic and rational decision processes are based on values an individual has already developed in an earlier stage, while acknowledging that values still change and evolve over time.

The connection point for the three categories is Gen Z’s urge to seek the truth behind information, claims companies make, and advertisements. The participants want to follow their own intentions and points of views in terms of sustainability to buy sustainable products, with intentions being in line with their (sustainability) values, which is why they are looking for information and research on products and companies. Yet, individuals become discouraged due to the lack of transparent information and regulations in terms of the usage of certain words, phrases, and logos. This allows greenwashing to continue to be a prominent phenomenon nowadays.

Thus, it is possible to argue that Gen Z is a value-driven cohort, with their values threading through all phases of the decision-making process while also playing an important role in the integration of various kinds of information. Because of their strongly held values, individuals know exactly what information they are looking for and need in order to make their decision. Nevertheless, it is sometimes difficult to find one's way through the flood of information, but because of their values they can filter out information that is important to them and give it an appropriate weighting in the
information integration process, combining all the information that is important to them and making a decision that feels right for Gen Z.

Based on the findings of the research, the theoretical model (Figure 2) proposed in Section 3.4., has been confirmed as a holistic model covering the rational, value-based, and intention categories of Gen Z’s decision-making process. The IIT can be seen to be integrated into the EBM decision-making model, which synthesizes the following stages: information search, the evaluation of alternatives, and the final purchase decision. Participants used their deeply held value of sustainability to inform their decision-making process, which included searching for sustainability related information, both from their social circle and different sources on the internet, to subsequently weigh them according to their values. This is followed by an integration of the information, resulting in a final purchasing decision. The incorporation of the GIBG model is seen in the influencing variables of the EBM model, specifically with attitudes towards green consumption and the environment. As the influencing variables have an effect on diverse stages of the decision process as well as the information process of the EBM model and in turn also the IIT, the three models and theories are proven to be interconnected and feed into as well as influence each other. Hence, it is evident that an individual goes through a complex decision process, guided by values, in order to look for true, authentic, and honest information which is integrated into a final purchase decision.
7. Conclusion

Gen Z is acutely aware of and concerned about environmental and social sustainability, as well as their consumption levels (Djafavora & Foots, 2022). Since they represent the newest and largest living generation on earth at 32% of the total population (Miller & Lu, 2018), Gen Z holds substantial market power. As they come of age as part of the workforce, so too does their profile as consumers and companies need to understand how best to reach this consumer segment in order to sell them products that align with their ingrained concern about sustainability. Gen Z’s decision-making for sustainable products is not yet fully understood and is in the nascent stages of research due to its contemporary nature (Le et al., 2022). Thus, the aim of this research was to better understand how Gen Z makes decisions to purchase sustainable products so that sustainable marketing can use this information to better meet the needs of this generation. To investigate Gen Z’s decision process and what aspects guide them when deciding on what to buy, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Based on the EBM decision-making model, information integration theory and green intention-behavior-gap model, inductive thematic analysis was performed, which resulted in themes that fit under the categories rational, value-based, and intention.

Gen Z’s decision-making process is thorough, complex, and based on their strongly held values related to sustainability. Their intention to be sustainable is prevalent throughout the decision-making process, starting with internal reflection around the true need of the product, combating internalized consumerism. To live in alignment with their values, their first choice for shopping is often secondhand shops, which decreases demand for new products from the market, further solidifying their values. Using their innate ease with technology and deep sustainability knowledge, they carefully examine new products online by examining how products are made, their composition, and the quality of the supply chain. They use rationality and a lens of skepticism to verify the claims they find on a company’s website through a trusted third-party site or by consulting with their social circle.

While Gen Z intends to shop sustainably 100% of the time, there is a self-reported gap in their behavior. Oftentimes, the sea of information they must wade through is overwhelming in volume, hard to understand and trust, and challenging to find.
Sometimes, they cannot afford the sustainable product they want to buy and sometimes it does not look as desirable or trendy as the unsustainable product.

By understanding that their decision-making process is based on rational (EBM model), value-based (IIT), and intentional behaviors (GIBG) to purchase sustainably, we see that their values act as a critical foundation for their purchasing behaviors.

**Contributions to research and practice**

This research has valuable insights for both theory and practice. In relation to the EBM theory, the research found that there is a strong focus on information sourcing during the decision-making process for sustainable products. Since this theory was modified in 1990, prior to the ubiquitous use of the internet, the EBM model should consider expanding the information search phase to include this significant shift in technological advancement. Due to the enormity of information one can access on the internet, this phase is inherently more complex and thus has more implications than what is offered currently. Secondly, since the results of the study demonstrated Gen Z uses their values to guide their decision-making process, it should also be an elevated step of the model.

Marketing practitioners should take the following into consideration when building campaigns for the sustainable Gen Z consumer segment. Marketing campaigns should work to build trust between the company and the consumer through honest advertising, perhaps including corporate social responsibility pitfalls as well as successes. Since this group is acutely aware of greenwashing, sustainability marketing can elicit a sense of distrust, so building transparency into marketing campaigns could increase trustworthiness of the company.

The research also suggests that there is a demand for regulated terminology for sustainability in the marketplace. Sustainable consumers would benefit from clear, easily accessible, transparent, trustworthy, and consistent language so they are able to quickly identify products that are sustainable to shorten their decision-making process. This would benefit companies in the long run since sustainable consumers would then experience more post-purchase satisfaction which could increase sales.
Future research directions

Throughout the research process, it was perceived that the participants were overwhelmed with the amount and type of information needed to confirm the sustainability factors of a product. They spent significant amounts of time sifting through information which left them with a sense of wondering if they could ever truly know if a product they purchased was sustainable instead of a sense of satisfaction that their purchase contributed to sustainability. Further research could be done on the examination of sustainable decision-making through the lens of the information overload theory. This could provide a better understanding of why there is a gap between one’s intention to purchase sustainably and their actual consumption behavior. This research could inspire companies to provide clear, consistent, trusted labeling to make sustainable purchasing easier and therefore more frequent for the consumer. Additionally, research could be further explored for the creation of a set of regulations to govern the use of sustainability words on packaging to increase trustworthiness and transparency for consumers.
References


Appendix

Interview Guide

**Shaping Tomorrow’s Sustainability:**

*Unraveling Gen Z’S Decision-Making Process for Sustainable Consumption*

**Research question 1:** What aspects guide Gen Z’s decision-making process for sustainable purchases?

**Research question 2:** How does Gen Z make decisions in relation to the green intention-behavior gap?

**Interview questions:**

“We are going to be asking you some questions about sustainability and purchasing but to start with it is helpful to have a shared understanding of sustainability.”

1. **How do you define sustainability?**

2. **If you have a choice between a sustainable and non/less sustainable product, how do you decide between them? What characteristics or facts/information do you base your decision on?**

3. **Where do you rank sustainability on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most important, in your purchasing decisions?**
   - What other factors weigh more or as much as sustainability?
   - How often would you say you purchase products that are sustainable?
   - In your ideal world, how often would you buy sustainable products?

4. **What do you think would motivate you to make more sustainable purchases?**
5. Walk me through the steps you went through the last time you made a bigger purchase.

6. Walk me through your research process?
   - Where do you go for information?
   - Do you consult the internet?
   - Do you consult social media?
   - Do you consider your social network?
   - Other sources?
   - What would you do differently if you had the time/money/etc.?

6. What information source is the most important for you when you make a purchasing decision?

7. If you factor in sustainability when you make a purchasing decision, how do you even know you’re making the “right” choice? Or make you feel good about your purchase

8. If you wanted to purchase a sustainable product could you tell us what would make that hard for you? Easy for you?
   - What are your biggest barriers to purchasing sustainably (if this is something you value)?
Sample Interview Transcript

**Speaker 1** All right. So since we're talking about sustainability and purchasing, we wanted to start with a common definition of sustainability. So how would you define it?

**Speaker 2** So I guess the kind of traditional definition of sustainability that I then iterated over and over is kind of the addressing needs of the present without compromising future generations. I think that's kind of the classic definition of sustainability, but I think. Building on that. From my perspective, I really like the idea of the three pillars of sustainability and how they're kind of kind of that more nested model of. Social, environmental and economic and how those really play into each other and those aspects of our lives and how, you know, that can. They need to kind of be in balance to ensure more of an equitable future. And I think that that model's kind of applicable for. All different aspects, you know, not just an individual level, but also organizational and network levels as well. Kind of finding a balance of those three and how your decision making plays into those three different levels. Because whatever decision you make, it's going to make an impact in either one and it'll translate to the other three or all three, in my opinion.

**Speaker 1** Yeah, it's definitely a complicated term. So if you have a choice between a sustainable and a non sustainable product, how do you decide between, like, maybe what characteristics or facts or information do you base your decision on?

**Speaker 2** So are you describing like a particular kind of product or just in general or.

**Speaker 1** We are open to hearing all sort of sustainability products, but what we've learned so far in our interviews is that some categories are more challenging than others to answer and it just gets more complicated. So it can be anyone you want, or you could give two different examples in two different categories.

**Speaker 2** Yeah, I guess I can kind of do like a more general. So, like in general, I think there's a few things that I factor in when I'm looking at different products like you said, again, it totally depends on what it is. You know, if it's clothing or like a home item versus
clothing, like your decision making will change a little bit based on just what's available and how easy or hard it is to get something like that. And again, like cultural context and where you are totally influences that as well. But I guess just in general, when I'm thinking I really look at, first of all, do I really need this and then do what are what are those environmental impacts? What are those social impacts? I think specifically for like food and cleaning things, I really look at health like how does this, you know, impact my health or my environment, especially with food and cleaning products, usually with clothing or more like items. I also look at is like, how long is this really going to last? Me? Hmm. That kind of ties into some of those cost factors as well. You know, if it is more expensive, but it's going to last me longer, then of course I would go for that option. And I think that's super relevant with a lot of clothing, especially since I do have kind of a background in fashion, I feel like it's like, okay, this is something that. You know, is it the quality is better, it's going to last longer, there's better guarantee on it. And now how to take care of it versus items that can just, you know, go away quicker, break faster. So, yeah, so kind of that. Environmental. Social. Health then also like cost and quality I think are kind of those key things that I kind of look at when I am. Deciding between different products and if they're sustainable or not. I think that kind of ties into all of them. Yep.

Speaker 1 Great. So on a scale from 1 to 5, with five being the most, where do you rank sustainability in regards to priority in your decision making?

Speaker 2 I think. I would give myself a 3.5 or four on most things. Again, like you said, and I totally agree with and I was going to say, is there you know some things are just aren't options for me yet or it's extremely inconvenient or out of the way and that's when sustainability gets put down a notch because of it's super extreme to try and do the sustainable option. It almost frustrates me to have to go that extra length to really get this. You know, I could spend hours and hours and trying to find the exact perfect thing, but sometimes it's really hard to get. I mean, with everything being digitalized. I mean, I think sustainability and digitalization is a huge thing as well. It makes a huge impact on accessibility. So it is easier, but still then you need to consider different shipping costs or, you know, location wise. So I'd say most of the time it's a four or a 3.5, just like, okay, let's make a really good choice. And not but I mean, a really good example is here in Sweden we have at the grocery store, the organic produce is in plastic. And I'm like, okay, so I need to decide between an organic food or a food in plastic. Yeah, they added plastic
or non or like it just blows my mind a little bit sometimes. And trying to reduce my plastics has been something I really have been wanting to work on and I feel like it's such a moral dilemma. Sometimes you're like, okay, so do I want to make this? Which impact do I want to make today? You know, I really need to choose and then I would need to look really hard to find a store that doesn't have plastic or it's super far away or something like that, or it's just the regulation. So again, most of the time I think it's pretty high unless it's like super inconvenient.

**Speaker 1** And yeah, it's complex. **What other factors weigh as much or more than sustainability?**

**Speaker 2** What other factors? Yeah. I think, honestly. Just, I think, feeling to like how the product makes you feel, I think is really important. I think that's super understated because sometimes you just want something that either looks better or feels better or makes you feel better. I mean, most of the time, the more sustainable option does make you feel better, but sometimes this more sustainable option isn't as nice is or isn't as luxurious. And sometimes you need to make that compromise between like, sustainability and like. I don't want to say luxury, but sustainability and I don't know. There's lots of different terms that you could use here. And there can be that sustainability in a negative light, that it means like lower quality or you're like going back to this granola ass thing and it's like, No, I want sustainability and this like mine and the nice qualities of it. And sometimes it means you are compromising when you do or you are compromising when you make a sustainable choice. But it just means are you compromising in ways that benefit you or in ways that might not benefit you, you know, intrinsically versus extrinsically? So yeah, yeah. I would also be another factor like, for example, I love these, I need new (product). So there's these really expensive ones that aren't very sustainable and whatever, but I really like the way they look versus the other one that's made of sustainable materials and whatever. But that's like the only option. And I don't really like how they look and they're not going to make me feel like as athletic or as a motivator like perform better, you know, And that's such a silly thing to say, but it is true like it different products make you feel different things. So sometimes that's also where I go, okay, I'm going to choose this because I know I'm going to be happier and I'm going to use it more too. So also that goes back to the quality and usability of the product. Like if I'm going to really use this more than the non sustainable or then the sustainable one, then I will pick that one.
**Speaker 1** Yeah,Yeah, I think. One thing you mentioned, like we have to be realistic that it's not all about sustainability. So let yourself go there. If there's something in that like doesn't feel like morally right, but the actuality of your experiences, that’s what we really want. So don't hold back. **How often would you say you purchase products that are sustainable?**

**Speaker 2** I think that's a really good question. I don't know if I could put a particular number on it because it depends on what it is, but I would say that it's definitely in like 90% of my decision making and purchasing is going okay. Is there another option? And I think that's just come with being more and more aware of sustainability. And that impact is so much more than just environmental impact and learning more about it. I think that just makes me look at everything around me a little bit more like, Oh, okay, I need this. Let me research a little bit more. Are there other options or things that I don't know about, which I think is good? I like this awareness. And ability to research is increasing. Of course. Greenwashing of course. But I like that there is a way to kind of go, okay, before I just buy this, let me just see what other options there are. So I think that's been really helpful. Yeah.

**Speaker 1** Great. **What would in your ideal world, how often would you buy sustainable products?**

**Speaker 2** Ideal world, 100%. Like I wished everything was sustainable and I didn't even have to go through this thinking and moral dilemma and what's right or wrong.

*All interview transcripts are available upon request.*